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CUBA: APPEAL FOR CALM

Seventeen years after the Cuban missile crisis, Washington was trying to avert another eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with Moscow over a Soviet military presence on the Communist island 90 miles off Florida. Despite some heated rhetoric on Capitol Hill, the longstanding posting of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba did not seem to constitute a serious threat to the U.S. or its allies in Latin America. But the troops did pose a clear political problem for President Carter—and a major obstacle to Senate ratification of the strategic arms limitation treaty. Even some liberal supporters of SALT II seemed to waiver. And Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Frank Church predicted “no likelihood whatever” of Senate passage

Precisely what Carter could or would do was unclear. If the Soviet troops have, indeed, been in Cuba for years, Moscow can hardly be accused of violating the spirit of SALT at a critical moment. And the unit in question was scarcely a tenth the size of the Soviet force based on Cuba in the years before the 1962 missile crisis—without provoking a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Accordingly, while some senators called for complete removal of the brigade, Administration experts suggested that a downgrading of their equipment or command system might do. “It is the combat nature of the units which is a matter of very serious concern to us,” said Vance. At a White House war-gaming session, even hawkish national-security adviser Zbigniew Brze-



Terry Arthur—Camera 5

Senator Church and CIA chief Turner: The Soviet troops may spell defeat for SALT

until the latest Cuban controversy is “satisfactorily resolved.”

Caught between the imperatives of diplomacy and the realities of domestic politics, the Administration took a determinedly moderate approach but couched it in stern language. At a bare-bones news briefing, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance added little to what was already known about the Russian unit—a force of 2,000 to 3,000 men, tanks and artillery. And he sought to play down the danger by disclosing that they had been in place for years—perhaps since the 1960s—although U.S. intelligence just lately confirmed their presence (page 30). “We regard this as a serious matter affecting our relations with the Soviet Union,” Vance said. “I will not be satisfied with the maintenance of the status quo.”

zinski agreed that Carter should move cautiously.

Some Administration officials talked about stepping up economic and diplomatic pressure on Moscow, and making it clear that SALT II was at stake. But they firmly denied any plan for U.S. military action. “It’s just like Iran; people are going to be asking why he doesn’t do something about it,” grumbled one of the President’s senior advisers. “He is doing something about it, but in a restrained way. That doesn’t sound very sexy, but we can’t afford to back the Russians into a corner.”

TRADE-OFF? Vance prepared to meet early this week with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in an effort to work out a compromise designed to get both sides off the back of the chair.